

HYSTERIA

Volume I, Number 1 March 8, 1980 Spring \$1.50



The *Hysteria* collective wants to create a vehicle for women to share our thoughts, feelings and experiences as well as providing a source of information about feminist culture, art, political theory, history and happenings.

Because some of us work at Dumont Press Graphix in Kitchener, we decided to put out a magazine to see what other women have to say, particularly women in southwestern Ontario. (Of course, we had to write almost all the articles in this first issue ourselves — what else would we put in the magazine?) Hopefully, this magazine will prime the pump, and input will come pouring in. We welcome information, ideas, outlines of articles and stories, photos and graphics

... Because the only way we can come to understand the world and our place in it is to communicate with one another.

Hysteria will be using a thematic approach. The theme for next issue will be **Women and Work**. Prospective themes for later issues include:

Women and the Environment, Women and Sexuality, Women and Children, Women and the Land, Women and Machines, Women and Madness, Women and Money, Women and the Arts and/or other topics that occur to us or are suggested to us.

All material submitted for editorial consideration must include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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H Y S T E R I A

Box 2481, Station B
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Hysteria

Volume I Number 1 Spring, 1980



IWD, 1980

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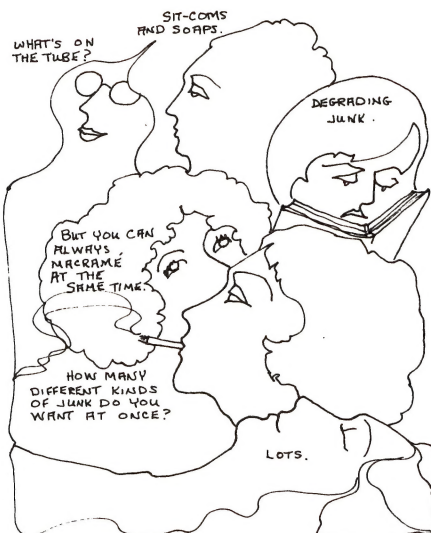
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**A feminist magazine by women in
Kitchener-Waterloo**



Editorial **H** ALTERNATIVES TO HYSTERIA

hysteria, n. Functional disturbance of nervous system (esp. of women), characterized by anaesthesia, convulsions, etc., and usually attended with disturbance of moral and intellectual faculties (formerly thought to be due to disturbance of womb); morbid excitement. [f. L f. Gk *hysterikos* of the womb.]

— The Concise Oxford

Hysteria. It's part of our heritage and part of our experience.

In the last century, hysteria was the women's disease. Forced into increasingly restrictive social roles, middle class women in particular reacted with apparently uncontrollable and inappropriate fits of wild laughter, gusts of tears, and incomprehensible (when not outright embarrassing) babble.

Many learned works were produced on the subject, and many male doctors made their reputation and a comfortable livelihood tending to the needs of hysterical women.

It was one way for a woman to get attention.

Unfortunately, hysteria afforded only momentary release; furthermore, it contributed to an image of women as the weaker sex, too delicate and unstable to be burdened or trusted with responsibility for anything except childrearing and other domestic duties.

An isolated and inchoate response to individual frustration, hysteria did nothing to advance the cause of women. As an historical phenomenon, however, it indicates how much women had to react to, and how powerless they were to

react in an effective manner.

But women began to challenge their limited role towards the end of the nineteenth century, moving on into the relative freedom of the 'Gay Nineties', affected by the revolutionary movements of the time, by industry's growing need for cheap labour, and by the early Women's Rights Movement.

Soon a threat was perceived to family life and Christian decency, and a serious attempt was made to encourage women to see domesticity as their natural area of fulfilment.

In the article entitled "Bringing Up Mother", we have an example of this phenomenon, an account of how here in Canada one woman, Adelaide Hoodless, was instrumental in the attempt to make increasingly educated women believe that household management should be viewed as domestic science, an appropriate and completely gratifying course of study for a young woman of intelligence and breeding.

The battle thus begun for women's minds continues even today.

On some, now as then, the propaganda works. A few, the lucky ones, never seem to notice it, or are somehow unaffected by it. Then there are the rest of us, in ever increasing numbers, the ones who tried to believe, to be what we should be, to want that, and who failed. (This is not the story of every feminist; this is just one familiar route.)

For many of us, this failure to become the woman we had been raised to be was experienced as the failure to be a real woman. Most of us did not yet realize the definition of real woman we were striving for precluded the possibility of being a real person.

There we were, female humans, but not real women. No wonder for so many of us there intervened a period of confusion and lack of self-worth.

A person could be forgiven for getting a little hysterical under the circumstances.

Nowadays you have to be careful, though. There's still many a fortune and medical reputation to be made convincing women they have an individual problem that will respond to a personalized solution. As our Health column points out, "Doctors have

responded to 'female complaints' by prescribing twice as many tranquilizers for women as for men."

Tranquilizers, as we all know, don't solve any problems, they just mask their manifestations. Women complain because of real distress, but the symptoms are treated in such a way as to destroy the will to be rid of the affliction. If we can't feel the pain, perhaps we won't notice or care when our lives are being taken from us.

We are here to enjoy our lives, not to endure them or be protected from them. We need to react to our situation with something more coherent, more positive and less isolated than either hysteria or oblivion.

With this magazine, we hope to make a contribution to the examination of our experience as women, individually, collectively and culturally. When we know more about what has been done by and to women to bring us to our present condition, we will be able to work toward a clearer understanding of where we stand in history and how to affect the future. When we compare our experience with that of other women, from the intolerably oppressed and the determinedly oblivious to the decidedly revolutionary, we can begin to appreciate and expropriate the opportunities available to us, to develop a feminist analysis, and to

create the widest imaginable variety of options for women now and in the future.

Implicit in this developing analysis is a recognition that the male-dominated systems that control our lives are irreconcilable with the respect for life and concern for its quality that are inherent in the feminist movement.

This magazine does not have an anti-male stance; it has a pro-woman stance. We will bring you women's points of view, a feminist, life-affirming perspective on as broad a range of issues as women wish to write about.

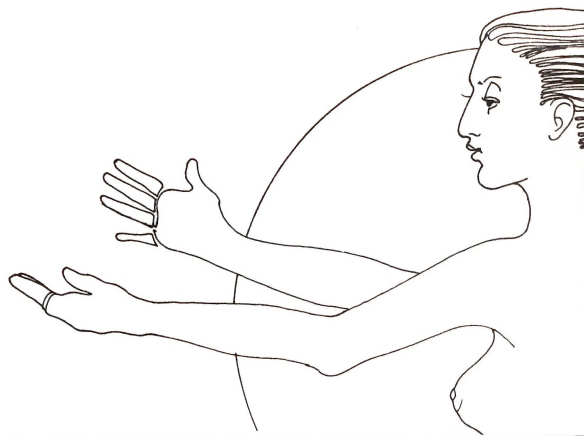
We will also feature beautiful graphics, entertaining stories, coming events, useful information, idle speculation, feminist fantasies, women's poetry, the odd bit of news, and whatever else comes to hand and appeals to us (anybody know any good feminist jokes?)

So — if a woman's lot in this life sometimes has you teetering on the brink of hysteria, if the way the world is going seems like madness, if you don't think it's crazy to believe that together we can change the world, then come along with us and seek alternatives to hysteria.

The editorial this issue was written by collective member Moe Lyons



Women & Health Care



by Alison Stirling

Today's health care holds special meaning for women. Our reproductive systems make us particularly dependent on doctors and health technology.

Modern medicine has improved contraceptive methods, lowered maternal and infant mortality, and developed more effective treatments of diseases affecting women. However, women's involvement in the health care system has been a history of dependence, passivity and unquestioned acceptance of sexist treatment. We frequently undergo unnecessary surgery, make 25% more medical visits and receive markedly different treatment and attention from doctors than men. Although contraception has freed women from the biological imperative of motherhood, many birth control methods have been shown to be dangerous to our health. Childbirth in hospitals has increasingly become an alienating experience for the mother who faces possible induced labour, fetal monitors, caesarian, and separation from her newborn infant for long periods of time. Complaints of physical disorders or emotional distress have frequently not been taken seriously, or have been misdiagnosed — women have been stereotyped as hypochondriacs. Doctors have responded to "female complaints" by prescribing twice as many tranquilizers as for men. In Saskatchewan, reports indicate that women between the ages of 20 and 29 receive *four* times as many psychotropic drugs. "Mother's little helpers" are supposed to take care of her so she can take care of everyone else.

We do not lack information on

women's health problems. In one week a sampling of newspaper articles revealed that: "Insidious" disease leaves many women unable to conceive, "Female anatomy has a flaw," "15% of breast cancer cases wrongly treated, MDs told," and "Banned birth-control drug given to retarded women." But there has been little action or widespread attention given to issues of the medical treatment of women. This could be attributable, in part, to the belief by women as well as men, that women are the "weaker sex," plagued by "perpetual infirmities," and in constant need of medical surveillance.

Dealing with the health system in a person-to-person struggle is an enormous and draining activity. To change the health care that we as women receive requires strength, pride and active participation in our own health care. It takes a shared effort to overcome the many barriers to decent care of ourselves: the sexism, stereotyping, and lack of sensitivity. Feminist health collectives are beginning to address these problems and to organize actions and alternatives. Some of the alternatives to the present medical system are found in special women's clinics, home birthing associations and self-help health groups. And a growing number of resources are available for information on women's health.

For ten years the Boston Women's Health Collective has provided comprehensive women's health care information in their publication *Our Bodies Our Selves* and in numerous pamphlets and newsletters. Excellent booklets on birth control, venereal disease, sexual harassment and general women's health resources have

been written by the Montreal Health Press and the Vancouver Women's Health Collective. A new national feminist journal *Women Healthsharing* discusses health issues, provides information on self-help and new research in medical fields of interest to women.

Women's clinics, reproductive centres and self-help groups offer explorations into new ways to relate to medicine and preventive health care. The practice of self-help means reducing a dependence on medical professionals for diagnosis and treatment of minor complaints. This can only be done if we learn how our bodies work, recognize when there are disturbances and determine if problems require attention from medics, or if the problem can be dealt with personally. For some women, taking responsibility for their bodies has meant an increased emphasis on nutrition and exercise, as well as overcoming excessive smoking, alcohol abuse and obesity.

Alternative health care is one approach to improving the health care system and it holds many personal benefits. However, as Kathleen McDonnell of *Healthsharing* noted recently:

Self-help is an important educational and consciousness-raising tool, but it does have limitations. One problem with alternative approaches is that they generally affect only a minority of women — usually educated, middle-class feminists. For many women the problem is not overdependence on doctors. Their problem is lack of access to health care; or to services that meet their particular

needs. . . . The strength of self-help lies in its ability to unmask and break down the professional mystique in medicine.

Self-help health care does not directly change or affect the medical system or its institutions. There are different paths for social and political change in health care — demands for more female doctors; pushing for the humanizing of hospitals and clinics; lobbying for policy changes that reflect the needs of women patients. A few of these demands have been met in progressive hospitals and medical schools. Birthing centres are being introduced in hospitals (although strong resistance to legal midwifery from the medical profession continues); the number of female medical students is increasing (53% of the students at McMaster in 1978), and some doctors are trying "to involve their patients in the decisions affecting them."

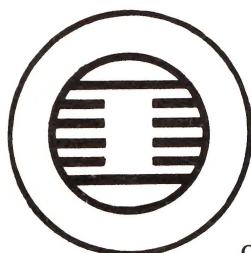
In Waterloo Region, recognition

of the particular needs of women's health has come from the interagency group, Community Resources for Women. In their recent report to the District Health Council they urged that an information and referral centre for women's health be established. At a women's health centre, volunteers and allied health professionals together could provide a multidisciplinary approach to the health care of women. A local group concerned with childbirth options, "Birthing Alternatives for a Better Experience" (BABE) has been lobbying local hospitals for the establishment of a maternity centre (since attempted at St. Mary's) and for facilities and support for women wishing to have home births.

Unfortunately none of the lobbying and reports and recommendations have caused more than a ripple in the medical system. Old stereotypes remain strongly ingrained and are reinforced in the education of new doctors. According to the 1975 edi-

tion of *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, a medical textbook: "Traits that compose the core of female personality are feminine narcissism, masochism and passivity." It is possible that greater numbers of female medical students will help change these attitudes or balance such views, but they face enormous obstacles in their struggles.

We need to work on education and health institutions from the inside and out. The responsibility for our bodies and our health care lies primarily with ourselves and with sharing knowledge and skills with others. In future issues of *Hysteria* this column will publish information on reproduction and birthing, the health hazards of work, natural remedies, and home treatments of some of our "female complaints." For information on groups and organizations involved with women's health care issues, write *Hysteria*. Let us hear any questions you might have about health and improving health care.



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The Feminist Party of Canada



When is a feminist not a Feminist?

by Shirley Tillotson

The bouncer in the tux turns out to be the waiter. When he brings my beer, it's, "Here y'are, sweetheart. Anything else for youse girls?" The "girls" are members of the Feminist Party of Canada, ranging in age from 20 to 50, and "sweetheart" is the out-of-town interviewer. As our gracious host turns his back on the table, Lucinda, a well-tailored blonde woman, audibly mutters, "He shuts up when you call him poopsie."

The Malloney's waiter may not realize that he is talking to founding members of Canada's newest federal party. (Then, of course, he might be the sort who would call John Turner "sweetheart.") In fact, he is quite likely one of the many men who think women have an abundance of fine qualities — all of which are shown to best advantage by ribbons and lace. At any rate, you can be sure that he'll react to the Feminist Party just as most people will — he'll laugh. And like most people, he'll only be showing his ignorance.

The Feminist Party of Canada (FPC) is serious. It is not another Rhinoceros Party. The enthusiastic supporters, 600 of them, raised the roof at the party's first public meeting on June 10th, 1970. Its committees — constitution, fundraising, media, membership, strategy, policy, education and outreach, and resources — have met regularly over the last several months. The party is taking shape. But although the party is genuine and is worth as much attention as any other political organization, it may live out its life in Ontario alone, with outposts in Vancouver and Winnipeg.

Regional difference is a fact of life in federal politics. Only too often what is political gospel in Swift Current is "amen" to a politician's career in Oshawa. Women in Toronto's professional and intellectual circles have been learning the joys of feminist

patronage (or matronage?). But the many women who are not of that group often aren't familiar with any kind of power at all, sometimes not even over their own personal lives. (They survive by not caring, by suspecting ambition, by not taking risks.) To them, casting a vote is the extent of political participation. Why would an ordinary, politically apathetic woman warm to the FPC any more than she does to the Liberal, Conservative, or New Democratic parties? "Because the FPC candidate would be a woman," one member of the party confidently asserts.

The FPC wants to see women in politics on "their own terms." Politicians like Margaret Thatcher are in power very much on male terms — reverence towards power, preference for systems over individuals, faith in competition. The women who hold office in Canada now, the party literature observes, "do not, on the whole, address themselves to those issues of concern to women." And FPCers suspect that it's no coincidence that "most female politicians, regardless of background or party affiliation, reduce their connections with women's organizations to a minimum, when they obtain office."

This observation has the ring of truth, not only as applied to female politicians and the people who put them in power but also to professional politicians in general and their constituencies. Politics, like any job, can take over a person's whole outlook on life. For federal politicians, the chances of this happening are enormous. From their home towns, they move to Ottawa, are immersed in their work, and acquire a taste for a kind of life that isn't available to mere local notables. They learn to love the Party. And the longer they spend with the Party and therefore the less time they spend at home, the more they know the Party and the less they

remember their roots.

Some political theorists claim that this separation of political representatives from their supporters is in the nature of human beings and political organization. But the FPC suggests — strongly — that it is more likely men's nature and men's ways of organizing that have shaped modern politics. In a statement published for the first public meeting last June, politics was said to be "the process through which society safeguards the humanity of its members." And if politics isn't such a process, the manifesto continues, then clearly women will have to step in and fix things up.

It's this commitment, ambitious but serious, that is the FPC's most exciting trait. It's no laughing matter. Gail McCabe, 33, a graphic artist, housewife and FPC member, says she has been vastly impressed by the capabilities of the women in the FPC. She had not been associated with the feminist movement before joining the Feminist Party, but unlike most of the other party members with whom I spoke, she had been active in federal politics, with the NDP. That party, she says, doesn't adequately deal with "people's, women's, humanist" issues.

Like Gail McCabe, Trish Wells, 26, law student and file clerk, had also looked for feminist political action in the NDP. She knew of a women's party in Japan that had grown out of a social democratic party like the NDP, and she had hopes. But the NDP women's caucus, she found, had closed ranks — she was 20 years too late. Inveterately "involved", Wells was delighted by the opportunity presented by the FPC. She had found Toronto feminist circles somewhat closed. For her, the FPC has made available a political forum.

This is a common theme in the members' rhapsodies about the new party — here women have a fair chance to make their mark in politics,

to get what they themselves want instead of servicing male-dominated party machines. Women can get in on the ground floor of this party — join now and you can help set up the policies and procedures for a federal political party. The FPC is a new “in” to politics. Or is it?

After all, what is politics? “Safeguarding the humanity of society’s members” is all very well, but how is it done? Politics has been defined more cynically, by people more experienced in politics — federal, provincial, street, or radical — than many of the new FPCers. What if politics is the struggle for power — in democracy, the contest for votes? Will the FPC be part of that struggle?

Different FPCers have different answers. Some, like Carol Zavitz of *Resources for Feminist Research*, reject as optimistic the idea that the FPC can win votes in the near future. Others, somewhat in the spirit of bandwagon conductors, are less cautious. Lucinda Flavelle, 27, a political science student, explained why people will vote for her party: “We’ll just simply say what we stand for. An intelligent woman — what else does she have to vote for?” Jenny Gonsalves, also a student, pointed out that the mass of people are alienated from big government and all the other “big” institutions. The FPC is meant to be “small” — lots of community contact, simple party organization, and decentralization. Men, as well as women, who want a political party where they can be heard may well look to the FPC.

What Flavelle, Gonsalves, and other official speakers for the party are saying is that the feminist vision is ready to be a political platform. Feminism can be the source of a better life for everyone, not “only women.” I wanted to know what the FPC election platform might be. Janka Seydegart, a social worker and teacher with considerable experience in women’s organizations, spoke for the policy committee. Perhaps wisely, she put me off: “We’ll have a platform by then,” she said. “We’ve only been around for six months.”

Seydegart speaks with an experienced accent: she knows that organizations don’t spring, fully grown, from someone’s forehead. But other voices from the FPC have a hotheaded

innocent sound to them: “Feminism is a level of cognition and a manifold politics which has an application to all matters of importance. . . . As the most momentous politics existing, feminism can provide all the elements for an imaginative and comprehensive platform.” Self-congratulation is apparently the only purpose this sort of “analysis” serves.

The FPC will not be immune to the mistrust that accumulates around public figures, who too often return hot air in answer to an honest question. I have caught naïve FPCers uttering such distinctively political phrases as: “We have discussed that problem at some length and we’ll continue to give it serious consideration.” In other words, “We haven’t got a clue, but really, we are capable of solving this problem. Put your faith in us.”

These women have faith in themselves, faith that their organization can be a means of putting their ideas for a better society into practice. But before others will have faith in them, they must build an identity. They will be mistrusted or ridiculed if they continue blandly to assert that they are not politically left, right or centre. After all, the FPC is not alone in claiming to be guided by the best interests of their fellow human beings. Undoubtedly every Canadian politician has at some point been guided by the notion that “the development of the individual within society” is “important.” In politics, vague expressions are suspect.

“Diversity of viewpoints within the party won’t be a problem. Dissenters

won’t impede decisions, they will just . . .” The fact that this party member’s sentence remained unfinished is probably more worrisome than any completion it might have had. It could mean that none of the women in the party care enough about their ideas to kick up a fuss. Or, it could mean that fights won’t break out in the open — there are subtle ways of expressing disapproval without making a big scene. Worse yet, it could mean that these women narrow-mindedly believe that all feminists think alike. No group holds together long if it can’t handle conflict. The Feminist Party needs to think about decision-making methods that leave room in the party for people who don’t always agree. Otherwise, the party will never be more than a Toronto clique.

But there’s no need for the FPC to suffer such a fate. Feminists, like other women who do volunteer work for social good, are used to working very hard and expecting little reward. The Feminist Party could become a focus for that energy . . . if it actually does find a unifying notion around which policy can be formed. “Humanism” and “humanity” are not good enough. Does “safeguarding the humanity of society’s members” suggest a resolution to the abortion controversy? Only when the Feminist Party of Canada makes itself clear on a few such issues will we be able to answer the question, “When is a Feminist not a feminist?” Let’s cross our fingers and hope the answer is “never.”

A local chapter of the Feminist Party of Canada was founded in Kitchener-Waterloo on February 7th. At present, there are four local members, three of whom are associated with the Integrated Studies Programme at University of Waterloo. The local group will meet regularly every one to two weeks. Policies will be determined locally, though the Toronto organization will be used as a clearing-house of information and will handle outreach, the party newsletter, and press releases. One half of the local membership fee will go to Toronto.

The Feminist Party of Canada is not yet an officially constituted party and so did not run candidates in the February 18 election. According to local FPC member, Sam Wagar, “Our policy is not to get involved in patriarchal government.” However, some members worked for individual candidates of other parties.

Aside from putting out a press release outlining its political philosophy, the FPC was not active in the election. According to Wagar, this is because the party is still in its infancy. “All our policies are in flux,” he said, but added that the FPC will eventually outline policies not only on traditional political issues such as national unity, unemployment, and inflation, but also on genuinely political issues which have not been recognized as such — so called “women’s issues.” Wagar predicted that some policies would be established at a convention of the FPC to be held in March in Toronto.

The Kitchener-Waterloo group is not yet holding public meetings; however, anyone interested in finding out more about the FPC or in becoming actively involved should contact Debbie Smith or Sam Wagar at the Integrated Studies Office, Room 1055 in the Psychology Building, University of Waterloo.

⑪ Press Gang: An all-women print shop

"If men weren't like they are..."

Seven years ago, Press Gang was a loose collective of five men and one woman who volunteer printed pamphlets and posters for left, community and counterculture groups in Vancouver, charging only for costs of materials. The woman noted that she cleaned the rollers a lot more than she operated the presses, so when two of the men resigned, she successfully campaigned to have them replaced by women. After that women printed more often.

But there were many tensions between the male and the female workers, and eventually the women took to working at the shop in the daytime and the men at night. In 1973 other divisions appeared. One man thought Press Gang should become a profit-making business, another wanted it to be the printer for the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), the third didn't want to print any more, and the three women wanted to make it an all-woman print shop. The women's proposal won, and each man received equipment and/or cash compensation for the wageless labour he had contributed to Press Gang's development.

Three more women joined the group. But in November 1973 Press Gang was once more divided, this time over pricing and quality standards. Those who left felt printing should be free and that "bourgeois" standards of neatness and straightness had little relevance for leftwing work, where the message was primary. The two who stayed — Pat Smith and Sarah Davidson, both still working at Press Gang — wanted to become more skilled at printing and at knowing how to translate current norms of writing and style, design and colour into propaganda certain to reach people. They expanded the group to the five or six women it has generally been since.

Kae Elgie of *Hysteria* interviewed Pat Smith in Toronto in September 1979.

Q: Seven years of the women's movement later, is it still necessary for Press Gang to remain an all-woman shop?

A: If men weren't like they are there wouldn't be any need for a women's movement. But men are like they are. Now God knows it's not their fault, but, nonetheless, they're like that. We found when there was a man and a woman and one job to be done, if it was a traditionally male job, for example something mechanical, the man would be in there immediately saying he would do it and the woman wouldn't even have her mouth open before it was his. If it was a traditionally female job there would be dead silence. Then finally one of the women would reluctantly volunteer to do it because, well, she knew how to type already, and well, it wouldn't take long and... None of the men would go "Oh maybe I should learn to make coffee, or maybe I should learn to do some of these things."

Another thing we found was our repairs were higher with men. They didn't know the first thing about how a press worked, and either they didn't know they didn't know or they were

too proud to say they didn't know: it wasn't proper for them to admit this. So they would be in there with wrenches and hammers, bashing the thing about. When in doubt use brute force. We were constantly welding on parts they had snapped off. We found women paid a lot more attention to how things worked.

It's very comfortable working with women. There's a special sort of humour and rapport that develops in a group of gay and straight women.

Men just weren't pleasant to be around.

Q: Does Press Gang, then, as an all-woman shop, see itself as a contribution to women's culture? Is that part of Press Gang's identity?

A: I think we would have trouble knowing what you meant by women's culture. Is that the kind of family humour women have always made and we hear our mothers and aunts do? Is women's culture endless soft-edged paintings of flowers that look like vaginas? Or is it quilts?

Q: Some people use the term to describe the growth of women-only enterprises, particularly in the tradi-

tional cultural fields of art, literature, etc., where women have made an effort to learn the skills so they could participate independently in them as women.

A: Depending on the member of the Press you talked to, you would get a more or less enthusiastic response to that. I know we have described ourselves as being in the business of generating images. Now, generating an image with which other people can describe themselves and their situation, that's the essence of culture.

Now just what is the shape and form of the image we generate?

We're not into Amazon autonomy. We've published a few things like that but our main thrust is more along the lines of the poster on class consciousness we printed. We once published a pen imprinted with the message "Romanticism is the opiate of the movement."

We're not at all into women's businesses. We've dissociated ourselves from other groups who want to do that.

We've made a delineation between ourselves and the co-op movement, that big network out here of producer and consumer co-ops.

Q: Why have you dissociated yourselves from women's businesses?

A: Because we've dissociated ourselves from capitalism.

Q: In some ways Olivia Records is a women's business. Would you dissociate yourselves from them?

A: It's possible, though I think people doing propaganda work, such as music, can have a little more leeway than someone who is producing a product solely for consumption. The distinction is one the Press made between itself and a beekeepers' co-operative which raised bees for honey and made frames for hives. We said, now we *look* like a business and we *are* run collectively, but we produce propaganda. On the other hand, you *are* a business, you *are* run collectively, and you produce beehives. I've never yet seen a beehive that led someone to an understanding of the roots of their oppression, whereas with something

of ours they may be able to do that.

Related to that, the Press has never seen itself as a place for women to learn groovy non-traditional jobs. We've turned down women who wanted to learn to print only to get a job. Women who come here learn a new skill, and a non-traditional skill, but it's in the process of learning how to make effective propaganda and how to provide printed support work for themselves and other people in this progressive movement.

Q: Would you describe yourselves as feminists?

A: For sure. Our official rap is we are an "anti-capitalist, feminist collective." We've never said we were socialist — I don't think we would ever reach a consensus on socialism so the most we can get to is anti-capitalist, but that tells you a lot.

Q: Who are you most concerned about having credibility with, being respected by?

A: The women's movement is fairly broad. We occupy a particular place in the spectrum, and sometimes I think we're the only group there.

Within the women's movement we represent an anti-imperialist anti-capitalist orientation, including class analysis work, which I think the women's movement obscures or glosses over. Within the left, the so-called male left where everyone's anti-capitalist, we represent feminism. So quite often we're there carrying the banner in the left for

feminism, and then in the feminist movement carrying the banner for anti-capitalism. It's important for us to be respected by both groups.

And then we like to be respected as good printers. In terms of the printing offered in Vancouver, we're good but not excellent. But we do offer one thing no one else in the city does: if we see something's wrong on your original, we'll stop our presses and phone you. If your work needs correcting, before it goes someone will do it. If you really need it on time and you fucked up, if it's a really good story we may take up the slack for you. If you don't know anything about printing and you're a community group, you can make an appointment with us for a layout workshop. We also offer to help people in the planning stages, suggesting possibilities we know you'll not think of, things we've learned over the years. This is popular. We find new customers almost always come back to us, because the more you come to us the better service you're going to get.

Q: Who do you do work for?

A: Press Gang has always had a very strong base in Third World solidarity work, which includes almost everything put out by the left in Vancouver on Vietnam, Mozambique and Angola. Now, we do Nicaragua work and continue our support for Chile solidarity and South African boycott coalitions. Also, as a feminist group we're tied into whatever issues are

happening in the women's movement.

About 40-50% of our work is for women's and left groups, about 20-30% for institutionalized community groups, such as the people's law school, people's therapy group, community centres, and then 10-20% is regular commercial stuff.

We don't do work for people we consider our political enemies — for example we tend not to print for one left group and its opposition.

Q: Do you now charge for your labour as well as the cost of materials?

A: Yeah, we changed. With the institutionalization of the left, when Opportunities for Youth started funding the people's this and the people's that, we had more non-profit societies that were paying their directors \$1000 a month coming to us for cheap printing. It just didn't make sense to live below poverty level so these people could save a little in their organization. So we started to introduce labour costs, on a sliding scale: some you socked it to, some medium, low and free.

Informally we still do that. Everyone gets charged the same rates, which are competitive with other Vancouver print shops, though we might give a rebate to some people, depending on what they are getting printed. If someone at the Press thinks the shop should make a larger donation, perhaps print a job labour-free, then it's brought up at a staff meeting. We



Continued from page 9

do a special favour — which might be for a rush job as well as for discount rates — for one group or another about every six weeks.

Press Gang now supports five, sometimes six, women working 9:30 to 5:30 five days one week and four days the next. The printing operation also underwrites our book publishing overhead and administration costs, i.e. everything but production and advertising costs of the five books we've so far published.

Q: Are there disadvantages to being an all-woman shop?

A: I can't think of any. We got ladders so we don't need tall men to do light bulbs. Strength? Not important.

Q: What about political isolation or economic penalties?

A: Yes, we've had people who would find out we were all women and refuse to bring us work because of that. We've also had people bring us stuff because we're all women. We would never have a man on staff to get the work people won't give us because we're women.

Q: Are there costs associated with Press Gang's political choices, your decision to concentrate on producing good, low-cost "anti-capitalist feminist" propaganda?

A: Well our salaries aren't big — under \$500 a month. Whether other Press Gang members feel they're making an economic sacrifice to do work they believe in is hard for me to gauge. I think people probably feel that. I've been at the Press when I didn't get any money at all, and then I remember living on \$200 a month, so my salary has doubled. Sometimes I hear about what other people make and I just can't imagine that much money. But it's neither here nor there.

There are some disadvantages to it all. Once I flew back from Toronto in the morning, went to a political gathering that evening and ended up at the Press late that night because something needed to be done right away. People know that if they can give us a convincing enough story why one of us should get out of bed, put some clothes on and go down to the Press and print their stuff right now, we'll do it. We always have.

Different ones of us get asked for

favours more than others depending on who knows us. Most people at the Press have some other political connection outside the Press and this determines who asks us for favours. One woman's a member of Working Women Unite, a feminist trade unionists' organization, another works at Spartacus Bookstore [a co-operatively run left bookstore], I work around Latin American support groups, another's involved in co-operative housing, and another works with SORWUC [Service Office & Retail Workers Union of Canada, a member-run non-centralized union].

Q: If it's not high wages or regular working hours, what rewards do you get for your work at Press Gang?

A: I've had people clap when I've walked into a room because I'm the person who stayed up all night to get the poster out so the meeting could be publicized. That's a nice feeling.

I've also had people look out for me and get me out of situations where arrests were likely because they knew I had to print a leaflet first thing the next morning. There's a lot of concern about Press Gang. We've been around so long that it makes people feel secure when we continue.

Q: How long do people generally stay at the Press? Are you an exception in having been there six years? It sounds like a demanding job, with fairly low wages, the sort of situation where people might easily burn out.

A: We've generally had two kinds of people — those who become Press "old persons" and those who didn't.

books for, by, and about women
non-sexist children's books
women's records, posters, buttons

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There's a point where you become an "old person." You may already be officially part of Press Gang but there's a moment, and you will know it, when you're really part of it, and seen to be so. You can see people take this new sensibility on.

Some people just don't make it through that period. They may be there a year but they never really make it.

I guess you could say the people who don't make it "burned out" but we don't use that term. I don't believe in burnouts. I don't like hearing people describe themselves that way. It's a dangerous term.

In any group of women who are feeling hard pressed, you mention

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HYSTERIA

"burn out" and ten minutes later they're all describing their symptoms. It's like the flu. It's a general term that doesn't mean anything.

Things that are burned out can't get repaired. They can't be overcome. It's a terminal condition. Whereas if you're talking about overwork, we can change your work situation. If your problem is that you're underpaid, we can change that. If you're bored, you can find something else to do. But if you're burned out, what are you going to do? The diagnosis doesn't allow for any causation other than yourself, as if you were a light bulb filament. And it's so general it doesn't help discover what's really wrong.

Q: How is the work at Press Gang divided? Are you a nonspecialized shop where everyone participates equally in all the tasks of both printing and publishing?

A: No. Each person has a major and minor specialization. For example, my major area of responsibility is promotion for the book publishing, and my secondary responsibility is printing on our medium size press. We always have two people familiar with each area — we never think of anyone leaving, but what if one of us was run over by a truck?

We tried nonspecialization, where

everyone did everything, but it didn't work. I think people need a graspable amount of work. They last longer if they enjoy their work. People also need to feel a trust in their own decision-making. A totally shared collective doesn't give people reinforcement for the value of their decisions. I think collectives can hinder decision-making — you don't need four people for every single decision — and people can emerge from years in a collective completely unable to decide anything by themselves.

The division of labour between printing and publishing has caused some resentments. The shop has sometimes split into two groups — one of which subsidizes the other.

Q: In addition to your pen and numerous posters, you've published five books: *Women Look at Psychiatry*, two children's books, *Jody Said* and *Fish Market and Other Poems*, and this year *The Anti-Psychiatry Bibliography and Resource Guide* and *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers*. What are your goals in book publishing and what are your future plans?

A: Many people at Press Gang have no BAS: this is an impetus to keep our books simple. In appreciation of those whose incomes are as low as ours, we

keep them low priced, though sometimes I think we underestimate general buying power. We want to publish books that are important to women, and this fall we will begin a special manuscript recruitment and development programme.

Q: Should there be more Press Gangs, all-women enterprises?

A: I don't think it really matters. I wouldn't say there shouldn't be. I think there's room for as many as can get it together and enjoy the work, but I would never say that all-women's-this and all-women's-that is the forefront of the revolution.

Q: What is important for women to do?

A: Well, I think it's really important for women to learn how to produce propaganda, and printing is a crucial area for women to be knowledgeable about and skilled in. I think there's room in every city or region for a community-type press — in Vancouver it's Press Gang, in Kitchener, it's Dumont Press Graphix — and room for community access to press. I don't think it really matters to anyone other than the workers who is part of that.

That's one way I feel. On the other hand, I know that quite often Press Gang is a source of inspiration practically for other women's groups.

VOICES

a play by Susan Griffin

presented by the

Windsor International Women's Day Troupe

Saturday March 15 8 PM

at the YWCA

corner of Weber and Frederick streets, Kitchener

Admission \$2.50

For more information phone 744-7424 or 576-7016

Susan Griffin's hilarious play, about six women ranging from a married mother of four, to a single 60-year old actress to a recently separated young woman, was first presented on March 8 (International Women's Day) in Windsor.

The actors have agreed to bring their work to us, and we invite you to an evening of theatre and discussion on March 15. Women from London, Guelph and other communities will be coming to see the play and share information on women's activities in the area. All money raised will go toward hall rental and reimbursement of the actors' expenses. It will be great!

Leaping Lesbians

Thursdays from 6 - 8 PM on CKMS-FM (94.5 FM, 105.7 cable), women from this area bring you music, news, poetry, conversations and announcements of coming events of interest to women.

We play music by women, ranging from old favourites and little-known historical pieces to a good selection of the new, vibrant, feminist music produced by such organizations as Olivia and Terrapin Records.

If you have announcements or information you wish to make available to women in this area, phone 885-2567 any Thursday evening during the show and we will be glad to air them for you.

The *Leaping Lesbians* show, named after a song performed by Meg Christian, is brought to you by local lesbians and is of interest to all women.

Connection

by Victoria Freeman

White heat. A dot on the horizon — two men in a boat, no a man and a woman, blue above them and blue below them, two specks in an ocean of blue. They struggle silently and one goes overboard. There is a sudden roar and the boat shoots forward, faster, faster, then slows with a moan and dies. Hours later it is still drifting in a blaze of sunlight.

The one left behind sleeps dreamlessly in his mother's womb, rocked gently to and fro, unconscious of the thinning trail of blood that leads to his fragile self. The one in the boat sits staring at the wake long after it has once again rejoined the calm; the evidence is gone as suddenly as the crime was committed. She stares stupidly at a patch of blue like any other, waiting for the film to reverse and the dead man to rise jovially from his watery grave.

Her name is Pat, and she is twenty-five. Six months ago she was a bartender in San Francisco, two years ago she was a gas station attendant in Belleville, Ontario. Five hours ago she'd been hungry and broke and stranded on a small Caribbean island after missing the weekly ferry. She'd slept in. She didn't have enough money for the ferry anyway, but she'd hoped to either stow away or flirt with the captain.

It was her own fault she was broke; she'd spent the past few weeks in a blissful cloud of Jamaican grass, drinking rum late into the night, losing herself in a host of strange black bodies, watching her fortunes ebb and flow in the casino, hopping from island to island as her inclination dictated. When she'd arrived half-corked at this god-forsaken goat sanctuary, she hadn't realized until she'd gone clear across the island in the darkness that the Paradise Hotel, which a friend had recommended, did not exist. Perhaps he had been joking. There were no tourists, no exclusive resorts, no casinos here, only fishermen, wealthy whites who had really gotten away from it all, and goats, hundreds of them.

But without tourists, she had no source of income — she's been planning to sell a little pot to keep her going. She resolved then and there to leave with the ferry that had brought her, when it departed in the morning.

But . . . the ferry was gone and that was that. Pat hadn't even made it back to the ferry dock. She was still staring obstinately at her watch, lying on the makeshift bed she'd improvised in a boat moored off by itself away down the beach. It was

still early morning. She didn't know what to do; at this point it didn't seem to matter anyway, so she went back to sleep.

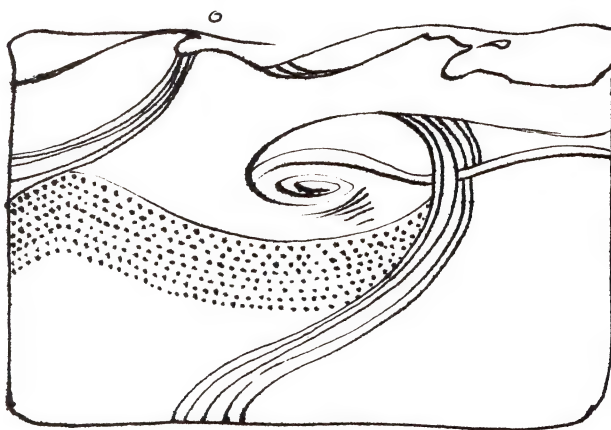
Her eyes opened and blearily focused on an object a few feet in front of her. She awoke with a start; someone was watching her.

"Do you make a habit of sleeping in other people's boats?" he asked, his face twisted in a giant smirk.

She wondered how long he'd been preparing that line. He tried again.

"If you sleep in my boat you can at least have the decency to talk to me."

"Glad to meet you," she muttered and shut her eyes again. The sun was very bright this morning. She wished she could go back to sleep.



On an impulse he bent forward and circled her ankle with his hand. She was up in a second.

"Keep your hands off the merchandise, OK?" she snapped.

He burst out laughing.

"I don't like being touched!" she said angrily, then regained her humour, "at least not when I'm cornered." She met his gaze with a curious combination of grimace and grin, then relaxed and smiled at his perplexity. "I'm always rude when I'm hung over."

"That's all right. It's not every day I find a beautiful woman snoring in my boat. I'm enjoying myself."

"That's evident," she said, wishing he hadn't called her beautiful.

She took a good look at him. He was conventionally handsome, tanned and well-dressed even in shorts, but these were not points in his favour. She was mistrustful of these suave play-

boy types: rich boys could land on their hands, he hadn't kicked her, he seemed good-natured, she admitted to herself that he was handsome. She smiled.

"My name's Pat."

He smiled.

"I'm David."

He offered her breakfast to his house, a small white building with palm trees. She was surprised such an out-of-the-way place was as the solitary type at all; in fact he was a socialite. He explained the island only four months of the time he spent in seclusion, attending to his business, which was moderately wealthy. He didn't volunteer much



Pat was not one to demand much from the men she encountered. That was the way anyway. She amused him with her present predicament and her recent past.

They dined on groups of small sweet bananas one for each. Afterwards they sat in silence, now that a relationship had been formed there was suddenly nothing strange in the company of

David watched Pat nervously with his fork.

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked, sounding as if he hoped so.

"No," she said, as if it were a question. "Should I be?"

"You seem tense." She gloated over that last word.

"No, I'm just restless."

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afraid of me!" This was a challenge, coyly put.

"I don't think I've ever met a woman like you before," he said.

He was really beginning to irritate her.

"No?"

Her voice was mocking him. He felt like an idiot for continuing.

"You're very strong."

"Oh, come on. I can hardly lift teacups!"

He could feel her laughing at him.

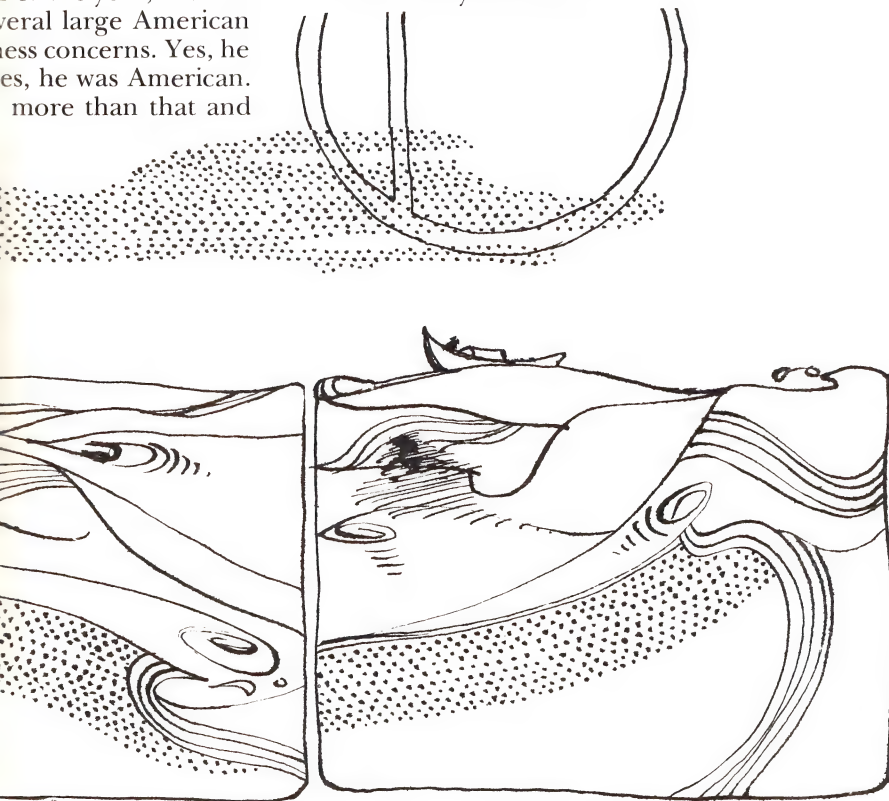
"No, I mean it. You seem invulnerable."

"Don't be silly. I get hurt all the time."

"But you're resilient."

"No, I run away."

"What do you mean?"



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"I have a husband in Toledo, a lesbian friend in San Francisco, a mother in Ontario, a guy named George in Nassau. . . . I get tired, I get bored, I start feeling that I'm more alone with them than without them — I leave. I like my independence," she said with a smile. "What about you?"

"I get hopelessly entangled with every person I care about," he said jokingly, then flushed a deep red.

The conversation had become an embarrassment to both of them, even to Pat, in spite of her composure. They hastily changed the subject.

"You want to come for a boat ride?" David asked.

"Sure. Where to?"

"Back to civilization or nowhere in particular if you'd prefer."

Pat visualized her alternatives: Freeport, where she'd made a fool of herself, Nassau where

George was (yes, she really had started this trip with someone named George), Florida, which she'd hated . . . no, she really didn't want to go back anywhere. And her companion was intriguing if not exactly nice.

They set sail for nowhere in particular, armed with a lunch basket.

The sun beat down on her suntanned body and coloured the inside of her eyelids a rich, vibrant red. She thought of nothing. She was nowhere. Her life was someone else's story. The boat was drifting aimlessly, and she didn't care if it ever got anywhere.

David sat in a deck chair a few feet from where she lay sprawled on the deck, and studied her body. She looked competent and capable even in her sleep; it was incredible to him that she should be so strong. He found her attractive, though more sexy than pretty; he imagined a myriad of other lovers bending over her, caressing her, making her quiver and cry out. Still she lay there, her breathing slow and steady; he couldn't explain why he was so fascinated.

They had made love earlier, but it hadn't been very good. He wished they hadn't smoked that dope — it seemed to bring out the hostility between them. They had come together in a rough burst of attraction, until the tangling of their arms and legs had become a contest, a wrestling match, a war, and she had pushed him off. His pride was hurt; he didn't think she'd been very understanding, but what could you expect?

She opened one eye.

"You again. I remember you from somewhere."

"You're still sleeping in my boat." His voice sounded a bit petulant. He was wearying of the game.

"Should I leave?" she asked sarcastically, and prepared to dive off the boat.

"Just be a bit more careful of my fragile male ego next time, OK?" He hated those words: fragile male ego.

"Oh, sorry," she said, but he didn't feel that she was.

He opened a hamper and brought out a loaf of bread, a cooked ham and a carving knife. He roughly sawed through the meat and offered her a very thick slice.

"Be nice to me from now on," he admonished, waving the knife teasingly.

"You know, your sense of humour is really beginning to bother me."

"Don't you trust me?" he asked, waving the knife and hoping to frighten her.

"It's not a question of trust. I just don't think you're very funny."

She was not co-operating. He hated her.

"I'd love to see you scared silly."

"You like your women soft and helpless?" She couldn't stop taunting him.

"You know, you'd be a lot sexier if you weren't so smart-assed."

"You'd be a lot sexier if you weren't such a boring chauvinist."

"Get down on your knees."

"I beg your pardon?" The situation was becoming more and more ridiculous.

"You heard me, get down on your knees."

"Jesus Christ. Would you cut it out?" Here she was alone with this kook out in the middle of nowhere.

"Shut up and get down on your knees." He was unzipping his pants.

She knew it was the wrong thing to say but she couldn't stop herself:

"Are you some kind of pervert or something?"

The blow was swift and strong. It was totally unexpected and knocked her off balance; she staggered and fell over the lunch hamper. She'd never been hit before, ever, not since she'd outgrown the sibling struggles of early childhood. In a way it was liberating — she'd feared that violence for so long, but now she was in a situation she'd never known before. She had no idea what to do next. For a moment she lay crumpled over the hamper, not daring to look at him, fearing that if she did, he would surely hit her again. But she could not let herself be beaten; she turned to face him and he met her gaze.

"Why did you hit me?" She demanded to know.

"I don't want to talk to you."

"I don't understand what's happening."

"Be quiet."

She decided to obey. She moved into a more comfortable position and stared uneasily at his feet. Several minutes passed in uncomfortable silence. She looked at his face every once in a while: it was expressionless. He was breathing heavily. She grew impatient, bored, and still he didn't

move. Slowly she stood up and leaned against the rail, watching him carefully. His eyes flickered over her, then settled into a stare. It was unnerving. Suddenly he took a step towards her, then another, in a slow and measured walk. She did nothing but watch his approach. He seemed almost calm. Then his arms flailed and she heard him scream and she was pummelled back and forth, socked hard in the stomach, his knuckles stung her face, and she was fighting, fighting to keep breathing, to keep fighting, her mind slow against the torrent of blows, fighting against the weariness of endless struggle, and her body reeled to one side and escaped for a moment and suddenly her fingers closed around the handle of the carving knife.

"Get away! I've got a knife!" she cried hoarsely, and waved the knife threateningly.

He should have stopped then and backed away and let her take control. But he came after her stupidly and tried to grab the knife. He saw it coming and tried to stop her hand but the blade skimmed through his shirt and tanned skin to the pulsing organs below. He cried out.

It was beginner's luck. She had stabbed him only once, but he was dying. For a few seconds more they struggled for the knife, then suddenly his strength began to ebb and he fell heavily against her.

She staggered back a step or two under his weight, but did not fall. With all her remaining strength she pushed him away, then watched, awe-struck, as the momentum of her shove carried his bleeding body to the edge of the deck and beyond. For a moment he was poised comically in mid-air, his mouth sucking in air, then with an undignified splash, he disappeared.

The humour of David's fall was lost on Pat. She rushed to the edge of

the boat and stared after him. A foot below the surface, he struggled silently, his mouth and eyes grotesquely moving, his hands grasping at the surface in slow motion, his blood gradually forming a pinkish haze around him. Her mind exploded. She rushed to the wheel, started up the boat, pushed it faster and faster until the motor screamed with effort. She couldn't go fast enough; she knew she was being pursued.

She looked behind her, and saw only sea and sky. She was alone. She stopped the boat and drifted.

She screwed her face, tight, tight, tight.

"You can't do this to me!" Her shriek faded away into nothingness.

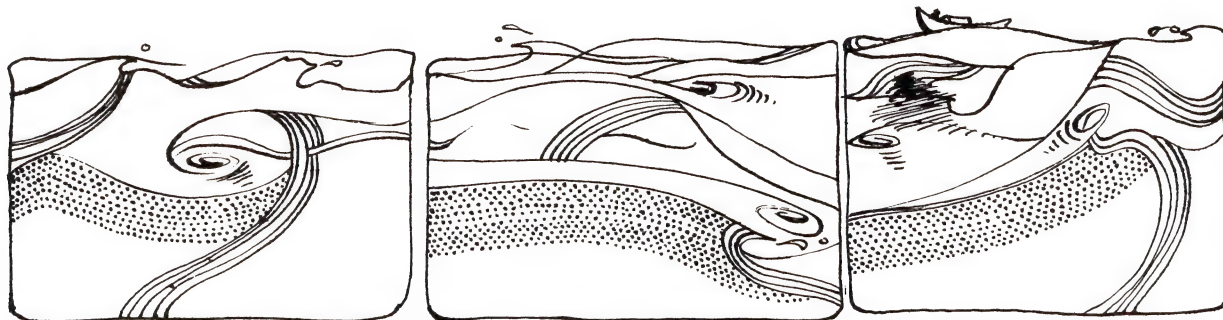
"I hate you!" You, you, you.

In a sudden rage, she kicked the boat, kicked the hamper, threw the ham and bread overboard, then hurled the knife in the direction of David's body.

She watched it slip quietly into the ocean. In a sudden flash, she remembered the warmth of the man when he had approached her. She wanted him back. For the first time in a long, long time, she cried.

When the ferry boat discovered her, hours later, she was still leaning against the hamper, staring out into the darkness. She was incoherent. She'd peed herself. She was shivering uncontrolledly. They took her to the hospital in the city, where she stayed for a week or so, then recovered and left. The police did not lay charges; they believed her story and her bruises.

She flew to Florida and then to her mother's place in Ontario and stayed there for a while; she worked in her mother's grocery. Then her energies returned and her itch to travel caught up with her again. The last time George had heard from her, she was teaching English to businessmen in Japan.



"Seize Power" says Carter

by Kae Elgie

Any woman who wants to be personally effective has to tackle the male-created power structure, according to K-W Community Resources for Women chairwoman Pat Carter in her talk to the group's January luncheon. In the early days of feminism, women created good alternative models, but had no place to take them. "You can create alternative feminist structures until you're blue in the face, but all you'll get is a blue face," she said. Women have to learn to use the existing system of power for their own ends.

Women must analyse existing structures and learn how they work. Discover the formal and informal power structures and relationships at work in your organization, whether it's a family or a corporation. Think about who influenced the last important decision and how they did it — it's as apt to have been over coffee as at a formal meeting, Carter said. Then use this analysis to guide you in implementing changes.

Women who decide they want to become more effective have an uphill struggle. We are trained to be powerless. When the 60 women at the luncheon catalogued, first, attributes of a powerful person, then ways girls "should be," the lists had nothing in common. Women's socialization teaches us none of the traits — such as

"ambition," "selfishness," "risk taking" — associated with having power; the skills we are taught — being "nice," "non-competitive," "passive" — are diametrically opposed to potency, Carter noted.

Women have to begin to take more risks, yet what we've mastered is the art of holding ourselves back and giving away our power. We magnify minor tests into life-or-death crises and imagine our total self-worth is teetering on the line each and every time. We don't accept that making mistakes is part of learning; we shrink from errors and so set ourselves up for defeat before we start. "I know you're going to think this is stupid but..." or "This is a worthless project but..."

What's sad is that we become what we've set ourselves up to be, Carter said. Instead we must decide where we want to see change happen and then find support resources to help us. It's not easy to take risks but there's help, she said. Workshops and courses can help women learn more about themselves. Books like *Pulling Your Own Strings* (Wayne W. Dyer) and *Games Mother Never Taught You* (Betty Lehan Harrigan) can also be useful, she said.

Women should also copy some male strategies for success. Teamwork, learning to play or work with someone you don't particularly like, is

something men learn at an early age. Women don't. Instead we seek out people with values like our own. But to use power more effectively, we have to make compromises, stop thinking about whether others are better or worse than we are and which one of us is using the "right" approach, Carter said.

Men use mentors to help them learn the ropes. Women should do this too, Carter said. But it's difficult for many women to admit they have skills, let alone share them with others.

Carter's talk was a prelude to a Saturday-long workshop on developing personal effectiveness which will be held on March 15.

Resources

UW Women's Interest Group

The UW Women's Interest Group was formed last year by a few women students looking for a way to share perceptions of themselves and society. On March 8th, 1979, the founders, Dianne Mark-Smith and Lori Farnham, presented a series of women speakers.

In fall 1979 the Women's Interest Group had speakers on assertion training and values clarification, a pot luck supper, a film "Growing Up Female" and discussions on the female being. For International Women's Day 1980 two days of speakers and films on "Opportunities for Women in Education and Careers" have been organized.

Every Wednesday from 4:30 - 6:30 PM the Women's Interest Group meets in the Campus Centre. The sessions alternate with speakers one week and discussions the next. Topics explored include the female imagination, women in a capitalist society, inadequate day care for working women, women and politics, and women writers.

For information contact Dianne Mark-Smith or Debi Brock at the Federation of Students office, 885-1211, ext. 3880.

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A powerful person is:

ambitious
selfish
decisive
dynamic
opinionated
risk taker
ruthless
self-confident

Girls should be:

nice
quiet
pregnant & married
willing to serve
polite
non-competitive
passive
good listener

The above lists were put together by members of Pat Carter's audience

Bringing Up Mother

Scientists tell us that men and women do not think alike — what a blessing! Then, why in the name of common sense, should our educational organizations be controlled from the standpoint of a man's mind? That has been the mistake of the past, and the sooner it is remodelled the better. When the door was opened for equal education privileges, women were not consulted or asked to advise or say what they would like to have done for girls and after generations of submission did not dare to venture an opinion. A few of the more aggressive and strong-minded type who were anxious to compete with men accepted such conditions and were satisfied. But the majority of women prefer to be educated as women, and no higher vocation has been or ever can be given to woman than that of the home-maker and citizen builder.

Adelaide Hoodless

These words were spoken nearly sixty years ago and yet they still influence our lives today, for we are the beneficiaries of policies and programmes instituted decades ago by women like Adelaide Hoodless.

Adelaide Hoodless was born in 1857 in Brant County, Ontario. When her son, John Harold, died in 1889 at the age of 18 months, she became determined to find out why. She refused to accept the popular idea that one in five babies died due to "natural selection." When she learned that her son died because he had drunk bad milk, she blamed herself; she felt that somehow she should have known. She decided to try and make it possible for all women to have the knowledge necessary to prevent similar tragedies from happening. This tragic event acted as the catalyst for her crusade to make housework a "science."

Between 1893 and 1908 Adelaide Hoodless laboured, almost single-handedly, to have domestic science courses introduced into 32 centres of learning, including public schools, private schools and local YWCA's. She worked tirelessly for "women's rights" as she perceived them.

She wrote newspaper articles, lobbied in both the provincial and federal legislatures and addressed numerous school boards and parents meetings. In her own words she has best expressed her intent: "Instil in the minds of school girls such a respect for domestic duties that they will realize the importance of these duties,

and be content in the performance of them."

Mrs. Hoodless' influence on women's culture in Ontario cannot be denied. The importance of her life's work is to be found in the following epitaph written in the *Guelph Herald* on March 5th, 1910: "For her the elevation and sweetening of home life was a point to be ever kept in view. . . . In other words, she evidently believed that women had a better work to do in the world than bothering their heads about its government except in so far as that related to the home, and then she was content to allow the men to act."

Why did Mrs. Hoodless find it necessary to formalize the instruction of sewing and cooking? To answer this, we must first realize the dramatic, and often traumatic, changes which occurred in women's work.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the home had been a manufacturing centre, the primary educational institution, and the nucleus around which social events and activities took place. Society centred around the home and the wife and mother was the reference point, the "pin which fused the members together." The knowledge and skills necessary to providing shelter, food and clothing had always been handed down from mother to daughter. It was an informal apprenticeship system where a young girl's mother was, in effect, the master craftsman.

But times were changing. Ontario began to industrialize and the effects

photo credit Guelph University Archives



of this shift from a predominantly agricultural economy to one based on commodity production had far-reaching effects for the individual, the home and the work-place. Many of the goods and products formerly produced in the home were now mass-produced in the factories and sold in shops and stores. Consequently, the labour market demanded a specialized labour force to operate the machines, which, in turn, forced politicians to make public school education compulsory.

Gradually it became apparent that girls were no longer adequately trained to be mothers and wives. They were spending too many hours at school and not enough time at home. A young girl had to pick up her "trade" as best she could after she got married.

Even more alarming than the lack of adequate training were the indications that many young women found housework boring. Adelaide dreaded the change which was taking place . . . "young women are now as active in the production and sales of the finished article in the factory and the shop as they were formerly in the household. . . . The monotonous routine of housework with its ceaseless cooking and cleaning has not proved sufficiently interesting to the girl with an active mind to counter-balance the attractions of shop, factory and office."

When Adelaide came to understand that a change was taking place in women's work, she began to look for

reasons to explain the change. After all, the home, the foundation upon which all of their cultural values was built, was being undermined. "It is generally admitted," Adelaide wrote, "that the 'Home' is the foundation of society, anything which tends to undermine this foundation is contrary to the first principles of nature and society, therefore an educational system, which diverts the natural homemakers into other channels, is getting away from the true object of education, which we have been told is to qualify for the duties and interests in life. Women have been educated away from the home. We have seen this clearly illustrated in the prevailing tendency towards office, shop and factory employment, with a corresponding dislike to home duties."

The villain, in Adelaide's reasoning, was not the young girls themselves but an educational system which encouraged them to take an interest in subjects related more to the job market than to the home. Training girls to be bookkeepers, stenographers and typists, she believed, made them disrespectful of housework and enthused about a career outside the home. As she told the members of the Hamilton Board of Education, "Mathematics and other studies [are] taught from the standpoint of trade and commerce. In other words, we [are] grafting masculine tendencies on feminine stock." Masculine characteristics in themselves were not bad. She believed that qualities such as aggressive competitiveness and career ambitiousness were admirable traits in a man, but harmful in a woman. "Is a Knowledge of Bookkeeping," she wrote, "(all very well in regulating household finances), typewriting, stenography, smattering of various languages, likely to produce home loving, domesticated women?"

It may be odd to consider stenography and typewriting as masculine trades but in the early 20th century, stenographers and secretaries were men. In fact, only 10% of all stenographers were women. To have women infiltrate these male territories was, for many people, upsetting the laws of nature.

Adelaide's views on women were supported by a religious moralism

that didn't look for alternatives or compromises. Either women looked after the home or no one did. She never considered other ways of managing a home, such as shared childraising, shared housework, co-operative child care centres, etc. For her, a woman had a God-given duty to be at home. She did concede, however, that it was good for girls to work after graduation from high school and before marriage... "there are too many reasons why girls must engage, though temporarily, in trade and wage-earning occupations." Also, she never looked at or analysed the effects that working inside the home had upon the attitudes of women. She centred almost exclusively on the educational system as the rogue which was seducing young girls away from the home... "the injurious effects of educating women on exactly the same lines as men and disturbing social relations by women's doing men's work is proving the fallacy of going contrary to God's will..." A disturbing judgment in a religious society.

Because the improvement of the State and the progress of its citizens toward moral and social ideals started in the home, she believed that woman had a responsibility to her society to have children and to raise them to be honest, law-abiding citizens. She considered children's lack of respect for adults, the increase in juvenile crime, gambling and speculation as indicators of "The Home" in trouble. She also understood, albeit somewhat imperfectly, that babies born into homes where the mother was inadequately educated to be a mother had very uncertain and bleak-looking futures. The way to counteract this social malaise was to give girls a "proper" education. By establishing women's institutes and by teaching cooking and sewing in the schools, she hoped to improve social conditions and to raise the standard of living of the lower income groups. "By incorporating such subjects as Temperance, Physiology, Hygiene, Physics and Botany in the Domestic Science course, and instead of studying the effects of alcohol upon the system as a text-book lesson — connect the subject with that of providing good wholesome food and a clean comfortable home as preventive measure

against intemperance, instead of memorizing pages of Physiology, telling how the blood circulates, teach the child how to keep the supply pure, and how to nourish the brain and muscles by proper tissue building food." She wanted women to know more than just how to cook and to sew. She wanted them to understand hygiene, nutrition and food values. She was shrewd enough to realize that to fully understand the changes brought about in the home due to automation and advances in technology, information was needed on housing, textiles, finance, home management and child care. All of which could be supplied in a domestic science course. Furthermore, it was hoped that these courses would encourage women to respect the home and remain in it.

Arguing about the comparative intellectual capacities of men and women was just as popular then as it is now. Statistics in the popular press and educational journals attempted to show that women were making headway into such male-dominated professions as medicine. Public opinion, however, appeared to be, for the most part, on the side of giving girls a separate education from that of boys, especially in the higher grades.

As one educator put it, "What training and what teaching ought we to give to the girls who are to be the wives of our boys, and who are to bring up the next generation of Americans?" (CEM 1885). The education of girls was meant to complement, to train them in a supportive role. It was difficult, if not impossible, for many people to conceive of women as doctors, lawyers, engineers or accountants. Especially, since they were being constantly characterized in the media as "sweet and wholesome;" two characteristics you would use to describe personal traits rather than professional attributes. "Without their purity and grace and intelligence and good temper," one education critic wrote, "society would crumble to pieces." (CEM) It must have been extremely difficult and tiresome for girls to be sweet and wholesome all the time.

The more one reads the descriptions of women in the popular press, however, the easier it is to understand

how difficult it must have been for women to do anything outside the realm of domestic service (by domestic service I'm including service and support jobs such as being a waitress, a teacher, a secretary, a salesclerk, etc. — which are extensions of the kind of jobs women did in the home).

In the context of women's history, Adelaide Hoodless was not an unusual or innovative thinker. She voiced the opinion of many women. What, then, made her an historical figure? Why is her portrait hanging in the MacDonald Institute at the University of Guelph? Her words and deeds were not revolutionary or radical. What makes her newsworthy is that she fought against women who were struggling to be allowed equal access to male-dominated professions. She opposed women who fought for admission to universities; in other words, she fought against the right of women to determine the course of their own lives. Adelaide Hoodless is important because she resisted the idea that women should be educated the same as men, and in so doing, she devoted her life to ensuring that women stayed at home.

Continually discussing motherhood and homemaking in such lofty terms must have discouraged women from doing, or even attempting to do, anything besides having children and maintaining a home. Adelaide Hoodless in her missionary zeal to make home-keeping a virtue guaranteed that women who had to work, or who wanted to work, would feel guilty. By emphasizing the importance of motherhood, she helped create a gilded cage which many women still find difficult to break out of.

To try and raise the standard of living of lower income groups, or to prevent further babies from dying because of ignorance is in itself worthwhile. To relegate this job only to women is to build a cell. By discussing motherhood and homemaking in such righteous verbiage, many women came to regard housework as being too elevated a position to be paid — it was an honour, rather than a job. Ironically, and tragically, this attitude was being reinforced at a time when society was coming to respect paid labour only.

A further consequence of "the women's place is in the home" attitude is that it made it easy for entrepreneurs and capitalists to exploit women by underpaying them. After all, they rationalized, women would leave their paying jobs as soon as they got married or pregnant. They were "bad risks" and should be paid less.

Many of the above ideas are now

widely recognized. They bear repeating, however, because unless we are aware of how we've come to consider some choices as more legitimate than others, and why certain options are available to us while others are not, we will continue to realize only those choices and not the myriad possibilities available to us.

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phoenix artists associates



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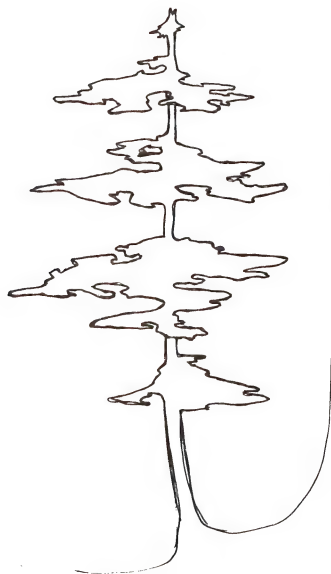
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... out from under

Women Write!

In April of 1978, Betsy Warland-Van Horne, a young Toronto poet and one of the founders of the Toronto Women's Writing Collective, offered a course through the Skills Exchange for women who wanted to explore their own writing. I signed up because I needed to break the isolation I felt as a beginning writer and a four week course for women was a lot less threatening than a university creative writing course. I was tired of hiding unfinished poems under my bed and dreaming that someone would discover me. Besides, I was curious about other women writers.

The course was held in an undistinguished house on Bathurst Street which was being used as a women's resource centre. About fifteen women showed up, among them a stewardess, a business consultant, a cook at a day-care centre (me), a woman who made her living removing facial hair by electrolysis, an unemployed graduate of a free school and a woman who seemed to be on a permanent acid trip.

Nobody looked like a writer. I couldn't imagine any of these women having anything profound to say. We sat around a table, waiting for the teacher of the course to arrive, eyeing each other suspiciously, making small talk.

Then Betsy came in, Betsy, a farm girl from Idaho or Iowa or someplace, who now wrote poems and renovated homes with another woman. She wore a jauntily tilted cap and looked strong and friendly; you got the feeling that she liked people and women in particular. We went into an upstairs room, dimmed the lights and each found a spot where we felt comfortable.

Betsy read some poems and we discussed our responses to them. She talked about finding a personal rhythm in our writing, tapping our dreams, keeping a diary, being aware of our feelings and sensations. She talked about how we as women must value our own experiences and start

from ourselves. Then she gave us various exercises to do, the sorts of things you might do in any creative writing course, like finding an object which suggests a metaphor to you, or trying to write sound poetry. After each exercise, we read what we had written — if we wanted to.

I remember a slow tingling feeling of excitement creeping through my body as one by one we read our work and discovered images, voices, humour, pain and anger buried in rough uncertain rhythms, but there, by God, in the afterdinner scribbles of a stewardess, a beauty expert, a worker at Bell Canada! I would never have imagined such distinctive voices in ordinary-looking, anonymous women. When it was my turn, I looked at my poem and panicked. I had compared myself to a roll of toilet paper. Why had I ever chosen such a stupid metaphor? I read it, my face burning, and then another poem about "feminine protection" to gales of laughter. Me funny? But women have no sense of humour! Or so I believed, in spite of myself.

Gradually, over those four weeks, I became aware of a whole wad of internalized sexism that I, a self-proclaimed feminist, had never been able to exorcise. Deep down I still believed that women couldn't write, women didn't write about anything important, women weren't as smart as men, women's writing was sentimental, superficial and soft, and so on *ad nauseam*. These traps were sabotaging my writing. I couldn't allow myself to experiment and fail, if my failure was proof of my genetic inferiority. I couldn't take myself seriously as a writer.

But here before my eyes was evidence that women could write; none of us were polished or experienced but our potential was undeniable. Here I had a safe place to work through the sexist programming which sapped my confidence. I needed a lot of support and encouragement to write and the other



women gave it to me (as I did to them) because we all wanted to see more women writing. We didn't criticize each other's writing very much; we'd say where it had spoken to us and where it hadn't. We offered a few technical suggestions, or at least Betsy did, she being the most experienced. Mostly, we encouraged each other in every way we could to explore our experience of things, to allow ourselves to make mistakes, to expose ourselves, to open our eyes and look at the world in different ways.

As the benefits of an all-female writing group became apparent, I became more and more interested in the Women's Writing Collective. I knew from Betsy that it was a network of six or seven writing groups which sponsored readings and workshops and had published three anthologies of poetry — the last of which, *Landscape*, had featured over sixty Toronto contributors. The WCC also sponsored the Women's Writing Salon, a series of readings where lesser known writers were introduced to a larger audience, and published *Fireweed*, a women's cultural and literary journal.

One night before the course finished, I went to the Nervous Breakdown Coffeehouse to hear Gay Allison read her poetry — she was another founding member of the WCC. I'd never been to a reading before. She read one poem, about returning to see her mother again and still not being able to communicate, and again I felt that eerie feeling of discovery. Suddenly I saw how much there is for women to write about, whole areas of experience — we were

no longer fettered by silence! I felt a sweet heady rush of liberation, for now it was clear that women writers could expand the vocabulary of female experience and validate it; by defining, understanding and judging our reality, we could have more power over it. I had found my commitment to writing.

When the course was finished, several people in the group decided to continue meeting together and to join the Women's Writing Collective. This meant that we could get involved in *Fireweed* or the Women's Writing Salon, were invited to WCC parties and were on the mailing list for the newsletter and notices of readings etc.

We continued to meet for about nine months. People came and went — including a printer, an artist, a Shiatsu therapist, a published poet and a rose seller. Usually, there were six or seven of us. We no longer had a leader and there were no set exercises. We met every two weeks, handed out copies of what we'd written, read our work, received criticism and suggestions, and exchanged information on markets and literary events. We fed off each other's energy. Every week at least one or two of us wrote something which surprised and inspired the rest of us or suggested new directions for our own writing. People would write nothing for several weeks, then suddenly arrive with six new poems. Most exciting was when someone brought in a piece of writing which showed that she had moved to a whole new level of awareness of her craft; she was focusing or loosening up in such a way that her writing was closer to the bone, more powerful, more essential. The group helped me to produce more, write more regularly, try new forms and even finish things for a change. There were others who enjoyed the group but did not go through as many changes.

Of course, with time, the limitations of this type of writing group also became apparent. We were much better at giving each other emotional support than good criticism. We offered each other our common sense and emotional reactions, and both of these were valuable, but we were not familiar with literary history or the subtleties of various literary forms.

Our group worked best when everyone was writing short poetry; it didn't work as well when a couple of us branched out into fiction and drama because it was harder to discuss longer works in progress and these forms were less familiar to the others. Also, we were at different stages in our writing, and we progressed at different rates; sometimes people got discouraged when they didn't progress as quickly as others and those who were taking off didn't get the kind of criticism they needed.

Eventually, I decided to go elsewhere for more expert criticism. I started taking a scriptwriting course at Ryerson. The teacher, Anna Feurstenberg, could be devastatingly critical; she believed that if you couldn't survive criticism and ridicule, you didn't deserve to write. While I didn't always like her methods, I learned a lot from her. Without the writing group, which built up my confidence, I would never have been able to learn from this experience; I would have given up in the face of so much criticism.

After about six months, the group seemed to lose its energy. Several people left because they no longer had the time or the interest, or felt they didn't have the talent. By February, there were two of us left. We made some half-hearted attempts to recruit new members, but eventually let the group go. I was working on various writing projects and going to university; while I enjoyed the group, it was no longer a priority or a necessity.

I think the the group lost its vitality because we reached a point where helping each other develop as writers meant helping each other develop as people, and we chose not to get that involved with each other. We were too insecure in ourselves to openly acknowledge our differences and challenge each other; perhaps we didn't like each other enough to invest the energy. Given our particular talents and weaknesses, we may not have had a lot more to offer each other. There are other groups in the Women's Writing Collective which have continued to meet for over three years.

If we had been more committed to feminism, the group would probably have lasted longer. As it was, the fact

that we were female ceased to be interesting; we had excluded men more out of a fear that they would dismiss our writing than out of a genuine desire to explore our experiences as women. Once I gained confidence in myself, I criticized the group for being segregated and safe—exactly what I had originally needed it to be. I had lost that clear vision of what a feminist writing group could be.

A third problem was that our association with the Women's Writing Collective never really worked. This was partly because the WWC was experiencing growth pains — several new groups joined at the same time and the lackadaisical organization that had worked for two or three groups broke down with six or seven. Communication between groups was sporadic to say the least; most of the women in our group had little or no contact with the larger collective. Also, I think we kept our distance because we felt uncomfortable with some members of the WWC who were radical feminists or lesbian separatists. I was afraid of my own lesbian feelings and that my association with these women would discredit me in the cultural mainstream. They scared me with their radical talk; sometimes I thought they were crazy. I suspect that some of the others in my group felt the same way, though we never talked about it.

After my writing group broke up, I went through a period of seeking out male mentors and male confirmation that I could write. Once I had that male seal of approval, however, I discovered that I missed the camaraderie of women, and that I'd developed a deeper interest in female experience and commitment to feminist struggles. Much of this change came from working through my fears of lesbianism in myself. I happened to meet a group of women who wanted to put out a feminist magazine — women who challenged me and criticized my ideas and my writing, and were not afraid to disagree. They were, of course, the women of *Hysteria*.

So here I am again, a year later, in another all-woman collective. I too would like to work for the cause. I'm ready for another round of trying to understand what it means to be female.

Resources

The Cambridge YWCA

For the Cambridge YWCA, the year 1979 has been highlighted by the evaluation and establishment of clear objectives for themselves as a women's organization within the community. The Cambridge YWCA is women working for and with women, offering programming that responds to the changing needs and issues of women. Their programme and service is "Total mind-body development."

They offer child care in an attempt to give women the freedom to continue their development. Their child care includes complete preschool programming, babysitting during classes and during activity days throughout the year, when school is not in session. They also offer co-learning programmes for mothers and children.

In keeping with their "total mind-body" concept they provide opportunities for the development of various personal growth skills which enable women to have more control over their lives. They also offer a wide selection of leisure-time and interest activities including social groups, recreational gymnastics and sports, craft courses and Neighbourhood Women's Groups.

Conestoga Women's Education Programme

The Women's Education Programme at Conestoga College began in 1975 as a major component of the College's affirmative action plan. Within the community, increased awareness is encouraged through the Programme. Courses, seminars and lectures are offered in accessible community locations in a manner which attempts to reduce some of the barriers women face in returning to formal education. Courses are offered in the evening and during the day. Childcare is provided at all daytime courses. Many women find that after

participating in the Women's Education Programme they are less apprehensive about enrolling in formal programmes at the College.

In the past year, the Women's Education Programme has increased its enrollment significantly. Much of this is attributed to the success of the spring seminar series, Focus '79. The series ended with a tribute to the women of Kitchener-Waterloo in the form of a dinner-theatre. Two hundred women in our community decided that there was a lot to celebrate and came out to do so. What a terrific show of support!

They would like to encourage you to help. If you would like a particular course or seminar presented in the community, give them a call and they will try their best to provide it. They wish to extend thanks to all who gave them the support they needed to get the programme off the ground.

Community Resources for Women

Community Resources for Women is a non-profit inter-agency group whose objectives are to co-ordinate programmes of activity which allow for information sharing, discovery of ways to co-operate as well as skill acquisition for various group members. The group was formed in March of 1978 and meets at the Kitchener Public Library on the third Wednesday of each month from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The initial part of the meeting is devoted to information sharing by the members. Each month a topic is discussed by a panel or a speaker. Lunch is available by reservation at \$2.00 per person. To make lunch reservations contact Kitty Francis at 885-9609.

A service directory was produced by Community Resources for Women with the assistance of a grant from Secretary of State. Copies are available from Brenda Fisher at 653-2511, Ext. 366.

Community Resources for Women provides a forum for discussion of concerns as well as a network within the community. Interested individuals are invited to participate in any or all of the monthly meetings.

Anselma House

In November 1978, a new service opened its doors to people of our community — Anselma House, a centrally located pleasant older home which provides emergency housing for women and children endangered by an abusive family situation.

Anselma House is incorporated as a non-profit, registered charity and is run by a board of 20. It receives funds from a Regional *per diem* grant and donations from businesses, church groups, service clubs and individuals.

Since its opening, 163 women and 203 children have used the facility, with an average stay of 7 days. On arrival many of the women tell of both physical and mental abuse they have experienced.

The staff at Anselma House consists of four part-time people: Gail Richardson, Debbie Lorenz, Jean Kirkham and Suzanne Stark. They are ably assisted by numerous volunteers so that 24 hour a day service is provided, including a crisis phone line (742-5894). This is necessary as domestic violence incidents peak between midnight and 2 a.m.

The staff and trained volunteers provide crisis intervention and counselling. Referrals are made for medical attention, legal advice, further counselling, financial advice and assistance in job and accommodation searches.

Anselma House has now completed a full year of existence. If they receive stable, on-going funding they hope to expand community education concerning domestic violence and offer broader service for ex-residents and non-residents where appropriate. They hope too to deal with prevention as well as the results of domestic violence. This focus would be with the children as well as the women who find themselves caught in domestic violence.

Tales To Tell My Mother

a review of

Tales I Tell My Mother

Zoe Fairbairns, Sara Maitland, Valerie Miner, Michele Roberts and Michelene Wandor. London: Journeyman Press, 1978. 161 pp., paper, \$7.80 in Canada, available at Toronto Women's Bookstore, 85 Harbord Street, Toronto.

by Kae Elgie

Tales I Tell My Mother is an historic accomplishment, a collection of short stories personally relevant to feminists.

For someone like me, with a lifelong addiction to women's magazine fiction but a political consciousness now substantially different from the editors of *Ladies Home Journal*, this collectively written British volume gives hope of continuing the habit.

Mostly I've read magazine fiction for escape. When I was a shy flat-chested 13-year-old farm girl, the stories in *McCall's* and *Redbook* promised me popularity and an adoring boyfriend/husband if only I could learn to put others' needs ahead of my own. Self-conscious and lonely, I devoured them.

But now it's no fun to escape into worlds I consider psychological and political traps. Yet I still need fiction. It is not enough, for me, to read abstracted prose about my situation. As necessary as rhetorical pamphlets, analytical articles and complex philosophical arguments may be to make me understand my situation and move me to action, I have to start with the immediate and the personal. Fiction enables me and other women to vicariously experience the other lives we might have had, to know our sisters' lives, and to think about our choices and our fates.

The stories in *Tales I Tell My Mother* do this. Their content is diverse — stories about work, abortion, sexuality, discrimination, politics and group dynamics, relationships with men, motherhood and art — and the writing is interesting.

The fifteen stories, three each by

Zoe Fairbairns, Sara Maitland, Valerie Miner, Michele Roberts and Michelene Wandor, self-described "women, writers, feminists and socialists," are divided into three sections. The first five photograph the experience of "being in the women's movement every day of your life," and vignette what happens when feminism meets the rest of the world head on. The next five examine what it's like to have your life changed by the women's movement, and the last five show how being in the women's movement affects the way people look at everyone and everything.

The writers met in each other's homes at one to three week intervals for eighteen months. Each story was extensively discussed and edited, and at the same time, the women's ideas of feminist fiction and language, politics and aesthetics were honed. Short discussion pieces on these issues introduce the three sections of the book while the introduction and conclusion make general comments on feminist writing and the five's collective experience of it.

The collection includes a variety of short story forms. *Bus Ticket*, a short descriptive piece about a woman changing the "Miss/Mrs." on her transit pass to "Ms.," is told in the flat emotionless style of a news story. *Keep It Clean*, an account of how a difference of political opinion about the Wages for Housework movement rifted two women's close friendship, is very polemical: at times it's like reading a leftwing sectarian position paper. There are also more artistically experimental pieces, such as *Martha and Mary Raise Consciousness from the Dead*, a complex image-laden stream of consciousness exploration of religion and feminism, taboos and liberation. It tantalized me with its almost-clarity and almost-understanding, familiar and compelling emotions for feminists trying to make sense of our new/old world.

The three stories I liked least, *Keep It Clean*, *The Freedom of Rosemary Paton* and *Parallel Lines*, were all about

women political activists. They had aesthetically intriguing styles yet failed to involved or entertain. I think this is because we have been conditioned to see politics as unpleasant and we also expect stories to resolve problems, not to raise more questions, as these did. The stories may be ahead of their time. Women are not yet accustomed to thinking of themselves as political persons, any more than writers and readers are used to examining in fiction the emotional or ideological implications of some women's determination to change our social milieu. Tales like these may help change these attitudes.

Some of the most interesting stories, from a literary as well as a political viewpoint, were in the third section in which Sara Maitland claims "our art is no longer . . . a private presentation of our individual experience . . . but a struggle to express, render accessible and dynamic our interpretation . . . of experience at large. Not only as it is but as it might be."

Penelope, a retelling of the Odysseus myth from his stay-at-home wife's perspective, shows how personal experiences can influence how one, in this case a writer, thinks about the general: our role models, social responsibility and social responsiveness, personal and societal development. Penelope recounts how her and Odysseus' desire to improve not only the physical but also the spiritual lives of the poor sea-battered people of Ithaca grew from their struggle "to live together in mutual respect and equality. It is too easy to divide it into an internal search and an external action: you can't do that. The way we saw men bullying their wives and women humiliating their husbands showed us the ways we had to go together; but equally our discovery of the strength we could have together informed the sort of co-operative state we tried to work on."

Penelope also embodies Michelene Wandor's view of feminist language, that more important than attacking old words and coining new is the "use of the existing language to reconstruct the submerged history of women throughout society, to show that women were indeed an active and vital half of the population." Three thousand years ago, Penelope "began

the perilous journey into another person: an endless journey that often since I have wanted to escape from into something easier or more dramatic. I know now there is no escape, no courageous escape, from that commitment not to live in isolation, to live as part of a whole, with difficult rights and equally difficult responsibilities." This short story is an exciting contribution to a new female mythology.

Not all the stories in section three idealize our experience. Some show the contemporary contradictions "all women, whether they know or care

are involved in" — in *Radio Times*, the pull between responsibility to a neighbour child neglected by his single parent, and sympathy with the mother's desire to be independent; in *You Only Have To Say*, the conflict between wanting consideration and respect yet sometimes craving to be lusted after as a sex object, even raped, between needing control over one's life yet wanting to be dominated, to be simply "made" pregnant. *Radio Times'* structure — freeze frames of the congested day of an at-home proofreader-mother-houseworker in which the ever present background

pop music comments on the protagonist's comments on the neighbour kid's mother's comments — plunges the reader into the many *non sequiturs*, inconsistencies and anachronisms of contemporary women's world. *Time, Gentlemen* lets us glimpse this world as experienced by men and see how the Women's Movement has affected two quite different males.

Tales I Tell My Mother provided me with a good read and a good think. My mother's magazines told me tales about women from her generation's perspective. Perhaps this volume will start the reverse communication.

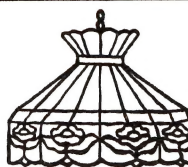
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She's Just Being Hysterical

by Mylo Songhurst

She's Just Being Hysterical will be a regular feature by women who have felt somewhat hysterical or been accused of being so . . .



Stinking and sweating I sit through the slow hours of another July night. From somewhere I dimly realize that I'm rocking again. A rhythm blurred by uncontrollable spasms and quivers. I'm a mere puppet jerking to the silent strings of incredible fatigue.

"Black velvet sleep, black void of the deep." Again and again the monotone falls from my dry lips.

"Well croon as randomly as you want, kiddo," says the cynical sister within, "it's the only comfort you've got."

"I know, I know — but isn't this supposed to be the time for lullabies?" No one answers.

The beer bottle is empty and my bladder is bursting. Two stolen and shattered hours of sleep in the last twenty-four. "But aren't babies a blessing?"

These past four weeks have been hideous. I never know if being the new mother of a surprise set of twins makes me the heroine of the greatest story ever told or if this is all a macabre joke on me.

"Me! Me! Who can see what is left of me?"

Caught between the bloodstains and the milkstains of motherhood. Caught in a circle of suckling two rapacious mouths. From some wordless place within I must summon an oceanic faith to believe in any future at all. My mind heaves beyond this moment searching for some shred of optimism, some drop of sanity. But it is all too much. My world of a room starts to spin and the colours come again. While my eyes close, my skinny body falls beneath the weight of achingly huge milk breasts. Slip, slip into the cushions. Slip into the benediction of the silver stream of sleep.

But the dream is there, waiting. Colours sheeting behind the rain. And from the pockmarked mud rears a gnarled root form — alien and familiar. Looming nearer, the horrible black thing grows toward me. The deeply wrinkled woman's head and torso pass the waters from sky to mud in a million rivulets. Her imprisoned arms end in two haunting orbs of petrified life. Against every repulsion I'm drawn to this hideous me holding the heads of son Harold and daughter Nichole. And the aging spares them not. A triad of ancients. Fecundity and death, they call it nightmare. From the last that is living in me I shrink into a defiant silent scream. Sleep, sleep but to scream. The shriek crushes down on me from every corner of the low-ceilinged room — but the voice is not my own.

A hungry, indignant infant blindly fights to find a lost nipple. With a gut-wrenching guilt I tear myself from the dream hallucination to see who is nursing now. I can't keep track anymore. Scraps of black hair and olive limbs tell me it is Harold.

"Hush, hush my baby. Here take it, quickly and suck. Don't, please don't wake Nichole."

I may have two arms and two breasts but I never managed the acrobatics of double nursing. Will I remain forever powerless against this

fearful duality of demand?

Twins are magic the family and friends had said. You've been twice blessed with an instant family of brother and sister. He so dark and dusky and she so tiny and fair. They'll always be company for each other. Christ you'd think that each had been personally responsible for this feat of fertility. Magic sure — but who knows the endless moments of madness. Two shrieking starvelings competing for attention, warmth, diapers and the endless agony of the tit.

This was motherhood month number two. The blackest of them all. My body shrinking to form a constant milk supply while my mind suckled on its own insanity. Things got better with time, experience, bottles and help. It's still killing to think what would have happened if circumstances had become worse. My health and my children's foothold on life became stronger. But the bitterness, the resentment against I knew not what was slow to go. Now the twins are 19 months old, a fascinating pair of angel-monsters energetically running to greet life open-armed.

And me, I spend my day sorting my roles like Psyche her seeds. Job and home, motherhood and sometimes the stolen moments to sift and write. During the abysmal worst of those early weeks I remember the words of a man, a stranger, who smugly intoned that, "hysteria is the afterbirth of motherhood."



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